

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Essay Contest

Lake Washington Girls Middle School

Grade 8

Age 13

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I always thought courage was easy. I thought it would flow through my veins, that it would take action on its own. I thought it would take hold of me and project me into doing the right thing. I would be like a superhero in a comic book, fighting criminals for social justice. This was before my courage was tested.

“Eww. He’s so gross.” They all laughed at the comment that she had made. They all laughed, unaware of the imprint they would have on this boy’s life. Justifications swirled in my head, dominating my thoughts. Each one more feeble than the last. The justifications tried to force their way out of my mouth, but I wouldn’t let them go. I sealed my lips and gave a weak smile.

I never knew why I sealed my lips to those justifications. I never knew why my courage failed me. This experience brought up a question that left me at a standstill. What am I doing for others? I had stopped myself from standing up for this boy who might be scarred for the rest of his life. My courage hadn’t failed me. I had been too selfish to use it.

Courage is a word that implies a dauntless spirit, someone who can persist through adversity and hardship. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had courage. He had it, gave it away, and showed his courage. His courage led the whole nation to a new dream of racial equality. His courage inspired others to confront their fears and speak up for their hopes and dreams. Even through the times of difficulty, when Dr. King was arrested in January 1963, he spread his teachings throughout the country. His famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” encouraged the nation to stand up for itself and for others. Dr. King wrote, “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea.”

Dr. King was met with hostility from some of the public who were against his ideas. He was arrested more than twenty times and was assaulted more than four times as a result of these ideas. He never lost hope, he never thought of only himself, and through his teachings he encouraged others to do the same. He knew that someone who was selfish would never get the very thing they seek because their self-centeredness would only allow them to gain what they already have. To gain what they seek they need others and their self-centeredness wouldn’t allow

them to get help from others. He loved people for their own sake, so he turned himself to higher loyalties, just like he said in his sermon titled "Conquering Self-Centeredness." The philosophies he taught, he also applied to himself.

Conquering Self-Centeredness requires courage. Courage is not easy. It is a mentality. Without courage, we could not stand up for anyone. Without courage, we could not do anything for others. Without courage, we would all live the "outside agitator idea." That is why Dr. King spread his teachings: to spread courage throughout the nation so everyone could do something for others, no matter what they looked like. Mrs. Rosa Parks, an African-American seamstress reflected Dr. King's teachings when she would not give up her seat on December 1st 1955. She did not do this for herself but for the nation to see what a simple action can do for civil rights. To show the nation this, she had to use courage which she wouldn't have had if she was standing up just for herself. All of the people in the 382 day bus boycott reflected Dr. King's teachings, and his courage. They let go of their self-centeredness and objectified themselves into a movement outside of themselves. They gave themselves to others.

Dr. King's unselfishness was a result of his courage. He fought for what he thought was right and never stopped to look out just for himself, no matter what anyone said about him. I should of thought of him. I shouldn't have cared what my friends would have said. I should have come to this boy's rescue, like a superhero in a comic book. I can never afford to live with the "outside agitator" idea. Dr. King's unselfishness and courage inspired me to be a better me. Just like he did the nation.

I would give anything to go back in time and erase all of the foolish thoughts about courage. Courage won't just come to me, I have to find it within myself and use it to help others, instead of just trying to help myself. I wish I could go back and change my actions. I wish I could have been more like a hero, instead of one of the villains. Dr. King has taught me that good comes when I let go of my self-centeredness and help others. I have to constantly ask myself "what am I doing for others?" because if I don't, I will always be a child and I will always be blinded by my own self-centeredness.

Bibliography:

King, Martin Luther. The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.: Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957 – December 1958. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.